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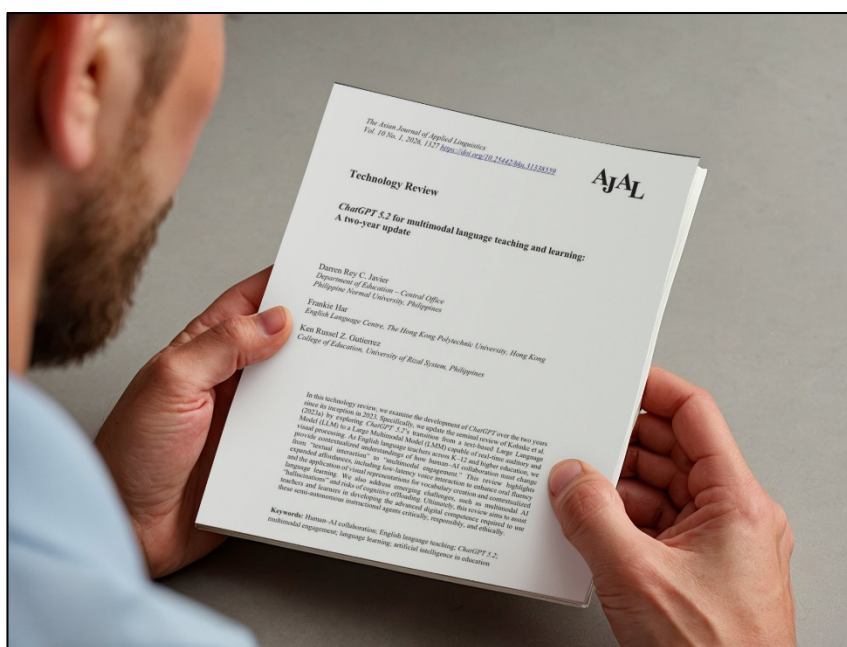
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Publish and Flourish: Re-envisioning Graduate Research Productivity and Mentorship in Philippine Higher Education

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Screenshot from the authors. Mockup template adapted from Canva: An example of improved graduate research productivity through expert mentorship, as demonstrated in the authors' recent publication in a SCOPUS-indexed journal.

This policy brief addresses the critical gap between graduate publication mandates and actual research productivity within the Philippine higher education sector. While recent policy modifications under Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 21, s. 2025 introduce operational flexibility, the structural barriers preventing high-quality scholarly publication remain unaddressed. By analyzing systemic constraints, specifically uneven mentorship structures and restrictive institutional bureaucracies, this policy brief outlines a transition from an output-driven compliance model to a growth-oriented ecosystem. It provides actionable, operational pathways for CHED Policy Makers, Technical Panels, and Higher Education Institution (HEI) Administrators to build institutional capacity, streamline administrative pipelines, and elevate the global footprint of Philippine academic scholarship.

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Introduction

Graduate publication mandates are foundational to the strategy of the Philippines to expand its global academic visibility and validate institutional research quality. This trajectory was formally institutionalized through CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 15, s. 2019, which tied graduate degree completion directly to peer-reviewed research outputs. Over time, tensions between policy intent and academic practice became evident. Publication timelines, shaped by peer review processes, often extend beyond program duration and remain outside the control of students. These delays affect completion rates despite adequate research quality. To mitigate these delays, the Commission issued an amendment, CMO No. 21, s. 2025, which introduced welcome structural flexibility by validating manuscript *submission* or *acceptance* alongside final *publication*, depending on the graduate track.

This adjustment improves feasibility. Comparative bibliometric studies consistently show that the Philippines lags behind major Southeast Asian neighbors in scholarly productivity and citation impact. Analyses based on Scopus-indexed publications indicate that the country ranks near the bottom regionally in both research output and total citations despite gradual improvements over time (Guido & Orleans 2020; Castulo et al. 2025). Recent Scopus-based analyses covering 2016–2025 likewise identified the Philippines as having the weakest scholarly output and citation performance among major ASEAN peers (Mindanao State University–Iligan Institute of Technology, 2025), despite research being a graduation requirement in higher education. This indicates that persistent underperformance may not be a deficit of research capability, but a failure to institutionalize the conditions necessary for research to reach publication.

Academic publishing is not a purely technical requirement but a guided process. Writing for publication, identifying appropriate journals, and navigating peer review are practices developed through mentorship and sustained academic interaction (Hyland, 2016; Paltridge, 2020; Yeo et al., 2022). Where such structures are limited, research often remains at the level of completed theses rather than publishable work.

At the same time, research activity is also shaped by institutional processes. Requirements for formal collaboration through memoranda of agreement, coupled with multiple layers of institutional approval and compliance-based validation systems, introduce delays unrelated to research quality and discourage collaborative authorship. These constraints remain largely unaddressed in the current amendment.

Flexibility in output requirements may resolve delays at the point of publication, but it does not address how research is developed, supported, and brought to publication. The

persistence of low research productivity reflects this structural gap, which this policy brief seeks to address.

Key Issues

This policy brief identifies three key issues that shape graduate research productivity and publication outcomes: uneven mentorship across graduate programs, bureaucratic and administrative constraints affecting research processes, and downstream effects that influence research quality and impact.

a. Mentorship remains uneven across graduate programs.

While publication is required, structured guidance on how to write for publication, select appropriate journals, and respond to peer review is not consistently embedded in graduate education. In many cases, students rely on informal advice or individual initiative to navigate these processes. Academic writing and publishing are learned practices developed through interaction, feedback, and guided participation (Hyland, 2016; Yeo et al., 2022). Research has shown that mentoring, collaborative research environments, and institutional support are consistently associated with higher levels of research productivity and publication output (Salazar-Clemeña & Almonte-Acosta, 2007). The absence of structured mentorship constitutes a critical disconnect between policy expectations and actual research capability. Where mentorship is limited, research often remains at the level of completed theses rather than publishable work, increasing the likelihood of repeated rejection and inappropriate journal selection.

b. Bureaucratic and administrative constraints further shape the pace and direction of research activity.

Requirements for memoranda of agreement, multiple layers of institutional approval, and compliance-based validation systems introduce delays unrelated to research quality. These processes reframe research from a scholarly activity into a compliance-driven procedure, where administrative clearance becomes a primary constraint. Studies on Philippine higher education have identified administrative workload, institutional procedures, and limited research time as common barriers to faculty and student research engagement (Elechicon & Paris, 2026). In this context, research progression becomes dependent on administrative clearance rather than scholarly readiness. Co-authorship is discouraged, submission timelines are extended, and uncertainty in compliance increases.

c. Downstream Effects Shaping Research Outcomes.

Variations in publication quality, inconsistent interpretation of acceptable outlets, and exposure to predatory journals often emerge from limited guidance and unclear standards (Paltridge, 2020). Differences in institutional capacity, including access to funding, editorial support, and research networks, further amplify these disparities. Empirical evidence from Vietnamese universities indicates that management policies, human resource development, and research infrastructure are positively



associated with research productivity, suggesting that research output is shaped not only by individual capability but also by the institutional conditions that support research activities (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Dao, 2021).

Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

Research productivity should follow a developmental pathway. It should begin with guided research design, progress through writing and revision, and culminate in publication. Publication is not the starting point of research productivity; it is its endpoint. Where mentorship and institutional support are present, this pathway is sustained. Where they are absent, research progression is disrupted.

a The Proposed Publish and Flourish Framework

To reverse these trends, the higher education sector must move away from an output-driven compliance model toward a development-oriented framework where publication naturally emerges from a well-supported research ecosystem. Table 1 outlines the operational shifts necessary to transform the current policy paradigm.

Table 1. Comparison of Current and Proposed Framework

Evaluation Features	Current Framework (CMO 21, s. 2025)	Proposed Publish and Flourish Framework (Mentorship-Centered)
Primary Structural Focus	Individualized output accumulation to clear mandatory graduation requirements.	Collaborative co-authorship and active skill acquisition through embedded, structured mentorship.
Administrative Pipelines	High-density bureaucracy, rigid multi-tiered approvals, and mandatory legal agreements.	Streamlined approval pathways, clear compliance baselines, and agile cross-institutional networks.
Developmental Intervention	Disconnected, compliance-focused milestones with minimal operational feedback loops.	Continuous revision support, explicit journal identification tracks, and academic writing integration.
Systemic Outcomes	Graduation delays, high manuscript rejection rates, and exposure to predatory journals.	High-impact scholarly outputs, broad global citation visibility, and sustainable academic growth.

A comparison of the current research framework and the proposed Publish and Flourish framework, emphasizing

differences in priorities, processes, research support mechanisms, and expected publication outcomes. This contrasts the current output-driven policy logic with a mentorship-centered approach in which publication emerges as the outcome of structured guidance, reduced bureaucratic constraints, and sustained research development.

b. Operationalized Policy Recommendations

To translate the Publish and Flourish framework into stable institutional practices, the following concrete actions should be integrated into the strategic agendas of CHED and Philippine HEIs:

Recommendation 1: Embed Mentorship into National Policy and Faculty Workload Frameworks

- Implementation Mechanism:** CHED should formally update the Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs) for graduate programs to promote ethical collaborative authorship, structured manuscript development, and journal navigation as core institutional criteria for graduate program accreditation.
- Responsible Agencies:** CHED Central Office, Technical Panel for Teacher Education, and HEI Academic Affairs Councils.
- Timeline:** Short-term (1–2 years) for institutional policy formulation; Medium-term (3–5 years) for complete integration into faculty retention and promotion systems.
- Resource Requirements:** Reallocation of institutional budgets to support adjusted faculty credit units for manuscript mentorship.
- Success Indicators:** Standardized adoption of graduate mentorship tracking logs across 80% of autonomous and regulated HEIs within 36 months.

Recommendation 2: Streamline Administrative Systems and Institutional Review Networks

- Implementation Mechanism:** Create a unified, cross-institutional framework that simplifies or waives individual MOA mandates for standard collaborative research projects between domestic universities. Replace multi-tiered, siloed administrative clearances with synchronized, concurrent institutional board assessments operating under strict maximum review windows.
- Responsible Agencies:** CHED Legal Affairs Service, Institutional Research Boards, and University Legal Offices.
- Timeline:** Immediate short-term rollout (12–18 months).



- d. **Resource Requirements:** Development and deployment of cloud-based, automated research clearance workflows.
- e. **Success Indicators:** Reduction of standard institutional administrative processing times from several months down to a maximum of 15 business days.

Recommendation 3: Clarify and Standardize Quality Baselines for Academic Outlets

- a. **Implementation Mechanism:** CHED, in partnership with established bibliometric clearinghouses, should maintain a dynamic registry of approved, validated index listings (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, ASEAN Citation Index, AGPCI) alongside explicit, definitive criteria for detecting and banning predatory publishers.
- b. **Responsible Agencies:** CHED Office of Planning, Research, and Knowledge Management (OPRKM) in coordination with University Library Networks.
- c. **Timeline:** Ongoing annual updates with initial implementation completed within 12 months.
- d. **Resource Requirements:** Centralized funding for continuous institutional access to verified indexing registries.
- e. **Success Indicators:** A 95% reduction in student manuscript submissions to unverified or predatory publication outlets nationwide within 24 months.

Conclusion

Recent adjustments to graduate publication requirements have improved alignment with the realities of academic publishing. By allowing submission, acceptance, or publication as valid outcomes, the policy reduces delays associated with peer review and program timelines. However, differences in research productivity across institutions remain evident. These differences reflect the presence or absence of mentorship, institutional support, and efficient processes rather than requirements alone. Without addressing mentorship and institutional constraints, policy adjustments risk producing compliance without corresponding gains in research quality or output.

Publication does not occur in isolation. It emerges from guided practice, collaboration, and sustained academic support. Where these are present, research moves toward publication. Where they are limited, challenges persist. Re-envisioning graduate research requires shifting from compliance to capacity. In this context, publication is not an endpoint imposed on students but the outcome of a functioning research ecosystem. The objective is not merely to meet publication requirements, but to build a system in which research is cultivated through mentorship and institutional support, where scholars do not simply publish, but flourish.

Recommendation 4: Democratize Institutional Research Support Infrastructure

- a. **Implementation Mechanism:** Establish regional research hubs designed to provide under-resourced State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) with shared access to premium text-editing resources, statistical consulting services, manuscript submission grants, and collaborative research initiatives.
- b. **Responsible Agencies:** CHED Regional Offices working in tandem with leading Center of Excellence (COE) Universities.
- c. **Timeline:** Medium-term phased regional rollout (3–5 years).
- d. **Resource Requirements:** Institutional co-funding frameworks supported by national research grant realignments.
- e. **Success Indicators:** A 40% year-on-year increase in Scopus and Web of Science indexed publication outputs originating from non-autonomous regional SUCs.

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DECLARATION

In alignment with the transparency standards of the Policy Brief Series, ChatGPT 5.2 and Gemini Edu were used to improve the clarity, coherence, and suitability of the language for a policy brief. The authors reviewed and finalized all content and assume full responsibility for the final version of this brief.

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The PNU Educational Policy Research, and Development Office

The EPRDO is a specialized research center in the University focused on policy research and studies on teacher education. It is established to provide research-based policy recommendations to policy makers. It also serves as the clearing house for all data relevant to teacher education in the Philippines and beyond.

Vision

The Philippine Normal University through the EPRDO aims to be an innovation hub of teacher education research and educational policy studies.

Mission

To strengthen the culture of excellence in teacher education research and educational policy studies.

Objectives

The EPRDO shall manage the University's research production, enhance human resource capabilities, and share expertise to other Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the area of teacher education research

Strategies

1. Establish and maintain a web-based university research portal that facilitates automated research management systems, and which also serves as the database of teacher education policies and teacher education research in the country and Southeast Asia.
2. Share research expertise and competence in teacher education research with other TEIs throughout the country;
3. Develop and disseminate the University research agenda
4. Design and implement the research capability program for faculty and staff;
5. Manage University's research production particularly the conduct of educational policy studies in education and teacher education; and
6. Serve as the implementing arm for research incentives and research ethics review.

Values

SYNERGY (Working collaboratively as a team)

EFFICIENCY (Delivering research services efficiently)

EXCELLENCE (Achieving high quality research outputs)

PRODUCTIVITY (increasing research production of the University)

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